

CHAPTER XIV

MACAULAY'S CHARACTER OF WILLIAM III

IN forming his estimate of William's character, Macaulay naturally relied most on Burnet among contemporary writers. The Bishop justly claims* that he had excellent opportunities of studying William through personal inter-course, and his first impressions may be compared with his final judgement. In addition to the many anecdotes about William which are scattered through his pages, Burnet gives three descriptions of considerable length. The first was written in 1686-1687, the other two after William's death.² The earliest character of William, when only Prince of Orange, is as follows :

The Prince has shewed by his conduct and action that notwithstanding all the defects of his education, and his total want of literature, nature is capable of producing great matters, even when she is not at all assisted by art. He has a great application to affairs, and turns them much in his thoughts, and indeed perhaps too much ; for his slowness in coming to a resolution is much complained of; but if he is slow in taking up a resolution he is as firm in adhering to it. He has a vast memory, and a true judgement. . . . He is the closest man in the world, so that it is not possible so much as to guess at his intentions, till he

¹ f I had occasion to know him well, having observed him very carefully in a course of sixteen years : I had a large measure of his favour, and a free access to him all the while, though not at all times to the same degree : the freedom that I used with him was not

always acceptable/ Own Time,
ii. 306. For William's opinion of Buraet, see
Foxcroft, Halifax, ii. 222, 229,
232.

- Supplement, pp. 190-3 ; Own Time, i. 689-
90, ii. 304-6.